

Benefits – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

GENERAL

1. What type of benefits would my survivor(s) receive if I die while a Federal employee?

The following benefits might be payable in the event of your death:

- Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI)
- Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) contributions
- Unpaid Compensation-(i.e., unpaid salary, unused annual leave, and the balance in your savings bond account, if any)
- Survivor benefits or a lump sum payment of your contributions to your retirement system
- Continuation of coverage under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHB)

2. Who is eligible to receive the benefits mentioned above?

If you do not have a valid designation of beneficiary form on file for the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance Program or for unpaid compensation, benefits will be paid in accordance with the following order of precedence:

- a. Your current spouse; if none, then to
- b. Your child or children in equal shares, with the share of a deceased child paid to the descendants of that child; if none, then to
- c. Your parent or parents; if none, then to
- d. The executor or administrator of your estate; if none, then to
- e. Your next of kin according to the laws of the state in which you lived.

Designation of beneficiary forms are also used to determine who will receive a **lump-sum payment** which may be payable under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) or the Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS) as appropriate. It is important to note that these forms do **not** affect the right of any person who is eligible for survivor annuity benefits. If you do not have a valid designation of beneficiary form on file, the above order of precedence will apply to payment of the lump sum benefit.

- **Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS)** — [Standard Form 2808, Designation of Beneficiary](#) (2/99)
- **Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS)** — [Standard Form 3102, Designation of Beneficiary](#) (6/00)

Any balance remaining in your Thrift Savings Plan account will be distributed upon your death according to your most recent beneficiary form on file. The

above order of precedence will apply unless you have a valid designation of beneficiary form on file.

It is important to note that your supervisor and the Public Debt Benefits Staff will assist your family members by providing information regarding eligible benefits.

3. I keep hearing about “Qualifying Life Events” or QLE’s – what are they?

QLE’s are events in your life that may qualify you to make changes in your employment benefits. For example, marriage, divorce, birth of a child, and death of a spouse are examples of personal life events that may provide you the opportunity to change your health or life insurance elections.

There are also work-related life events that may provide the opportunity to make a change in your benefits. For example, going from a full-time work schedule to a part-time work schedule would provide you with an opportunity to change your health insurance.

4. I got married 6 months ago. Can I add my new spouse to my health insurance now?

Marriage is generally a QLE for various benefit changes, but there are usually time limits on making changes because of a life event. In most cases, you must make the changes within 60 days of the life event or in this specific case, 31 days before to 60 days after the date of the marriage. If you experience a QLE and need to make changes to your benefits, contact the Public Debt Benefits Staff as soon as possible.

RETIREMENT

1. How do I know what retirement system I am under?

You can look at block 30 of your most recent SF-50, Notification of Personnel Action. Your retirement system will be identified by one of the following codes:

1 = Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS)

2 = FICA (Social Security)

6 = Civil Service Retirement System – Special (CSRS) – Law Enforcement

C = CSRS Offset (CSRS and Social Security)

E = CSRS Offset (CSRS and Social Security) – Law Enforcement

K = Federal Employees’ Retirement System (FERS) and Social Security

M = FERS and Social Security – Special

2. When am I eligible for optional (regular) retirement? I am not a Law Enforcement Officer (LEO).

If you are covered under CSRS or CSRS Offset, you are eligible for optional (regular) retirement if you meet any of the following criteria:

- Age 62 (minimum) with at least 5 years creditable service
- Age 60 (minimum) with at least 20 years creditable service
- Age 55 (minimum) with at least 30 years creditable service

If you are covered under FERS, you are eligible to retire if you meet any of the following criteria:

- Age 62 (minimum) with at least 5 years creditable service
- Age 60 (minimum) with at least 20 years creditable service
- Minimum Retirement Age (MRA) with at least 30 years of creditable service
- MRA with at least 10 years of creditable service– (Under this option, you will receive a reduced annuity unless you postpone receipt of your annuity until you meet one of the above age and service combinations.)

3. What is “Minimum Retirement Age (MRA)”?

MRA is the earliest age at which a FERS employee can retire with either a full or reduced annuity benefit. This age is based on the year in which you were born, as outlined in the chart below:

YEAR OF BIRTH	MRA
Before 1948	55 years
1948	55 years, 2 months
1949	55 years, 4 months
1950	55 years, 6 months
1951	55 years, 8 months
1952	55 years, 10 months
1953 to 1964	56 years
1965	56 years, 2 months
1966	56 years, 4 months
1967	56 years, 6 months
1968	56 years, 8 months
1969	56 years, 10 months
1970 and after	57 years

4. What are the eligibility requirements for Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs)?

LEOs under CSRS or CSRS Offset can retire as early as age 50 if they have at least 20 years of service covered by the law enforcement retirement provisions. LEOs under FERS can also retire at age 50 with at least 20 years of service under law enforcement retirement provisions. FERS employees also have the opportunity to retire at *any age* if they have at least 25 years of service under law enforcement retirement provisions.

Once you've met these requirements, you can retire under law enforcement provisions, even if you are not currently in a law enforcement position.

5. Will my sick leave balance be included in my retirement annuity?

If you are under CSRS or CSRS Offset, your sick leave balance at retirement will be converted to calendar time and be added to your actual service to determine your *total service*. The years and months of your *total service* will be used to calculate your retirement annuity.

If you transferred from CSRS to FERS, your sick leave balance at the time you transferred to FERS will be used in the calculation of your annuity.

If you were automatically covered by FERS, your sick leave cannot be used in the computation of your annuity.

THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN

1. How much can I contribute to the TSP?

In 2004, CSRS or CSRS Offset employees can contribute up to 9% of their salary. FERS employees can contribute up to 14% of their salary. This limit is expected to rise to 10% and 15%, respectively, in 2005. Beginning in 2006, both CSRS and FERS employees will be limited to the current IRS deferral limit.

2. What are "catch-up" contributions?

Catch-up provisions allow employees age 50 and older to make additional contributions to the TSP over the regular annual deferral limit. The limit on catch-up contributions changes each year, but it is \$3,000 for the 2004 tax year.

3. How can I change how my TSP funds are invested?

You make investment changes through your Account Access on the TSP web site at <http://www.tsp.gov>. You will need to do a Contribution Allocation to change how future contributions will be invested or an Interfund Transfer to change how the current balance of your TSP account is distributed.

4. Can I take a loan from the TSP?

Yes, but only under certain conditions. Check out the current information on this benefit at <http://www.tsp.gov/forms/tspb04.pdf>.

5. What are my TSP options when I separate or retire from Federal service?

You can check out your available options via the TSP web site at <http://www.tsp.gov/features/chapter13.html>.

HEALTH INSURANCE

1. Can I continue my Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) coverage into retirement?

You can continue your FEHB enrollment into retirement without any change in benefits or cost if you meet one of the following criteria:

- You have been enrolled (or covered as a family member) in the FEHB Program for the 5 years of service immediately preceding retirement.
- You have been enrolled (or covered as a family member) in the FEHB Program since your first opportunity to enroll, if less than 5 years.

Under certain circumstances, OPM can waive enrollment requirement merits such as in the case of a retirement “buy-out” situation. For instructions on how to request such a waiver, talk with a Benefits Specialist.

2. I have a court order that says I must provide health insurance for my former spouse. Can she be included as a family member on my federal policy?

No, your former spouse is not eligible for coverage under your federal policy. She may be eligible for coverage under the health benefit program’s Temporary Continuation of Coverage (TCC) provisions. For more information on TCC, visit the OPM web site at www.opm.gov/insure/health/tcc. If TCC provisions do not apply, you would need to pursue a private policy for your ex-spouse.

LIFE INSURANCE

1. Can I continue my Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) into retirement?

You can continue your FEGLI coverage into retirement if you meet one of the following criteria:

- You have been enrolled in the program for the 5 years of service immediately preceding retirement.
- You have been enrolled in the program since your first opportunity to enroll, if less than 5 years.

Your BPD Specialist is responsible for determining eligibility under OPM's regulations.

2. How much will I pay for life insurance in retirement?

The cost of your coverage depends on the reduction election you make. Life insurance retirement options are described [here](#).

3. How can I increase my life insurance coverage?

You may be able to elect additional coverage on yourself if you meet [one](#) of the following criteria:

- If it has been at least one year since you last waived life insurance and you have received approval of a Request for Insurance based on a qualifying physical examination
- You have experienced a "Qualifying Life Event"

Contact the Benefits Staff for more information.